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## **THE CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF THE EU'S NEIGHBOURHOOD**

The chapter argues that the ENP has functioned as a mechanism of geopolitical ordering for how the EU approaches the areas immediately beyond its borders. It is, however, one premised on a particular mindscape or geospatial vision that infuses the ENP with an imperial impulse. Despite this, the chapter argues that the EU's ability to order the neighbourhood is limited by the actions and preferences of partner countries and other neighbours whose constitutive capabilities should not be discounted. One consequence is that the geospatial construction of the neighbourhood and the construction of the EU more generally are mutually imbricated.

### **Introduction**

Since its founding as the European Economic Community in 1957 the history of the European project has been one of both steadily deepening levels of integration and steadily expanding membership. From an original six members in 1957, the 2004 enlargement brought the number of members to 25, with Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia joining subsequently. While all the enlargements have raised important issues, the 2004 enlargement was particularly significant. This was because, although debates about the Union's continuing ability to take on new members have always been aired, the 2004 enlargement process resulted in a definitive policy stance that future enlargements would be few and far between. With an unprecedented ten new members to be integrated it was argued the Union's borders needed to be delimited once and for all if the EU was to have any hope of preserving its democratic legitimacy and of remaining bureaucratically functional. Thus, in 2003 the European Commission (2003) issued a communication on the 'Wider Europe Neighbourhood' calling for 'A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours'. By 2004 the Wider Europe initiative had transformed into the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Although enlargement was perceived as challenging the EU's democratic legitimacy and bureaucratic functionality the ENP's introduction created its own challenges, principal of which concerned security. Despite having gradually evolved its own security and defence dimensions, the EU's primary security enhancing capabilities have been overwhelmingly connected to the very processes of further integration and enlargement (Wæver 1996; 1998). In other words, the promise of future enlargement and inclusion within the European club has been used to promote stability beyond the EU's borders. With further enlargement now precluded there was therefore concern as to how stability and security might be maintained in future.

Responding to this challenge is at the heart of the ENP, with this aspiration already clearly articulated in the Commission's 2003 communication on the Wider Europe, which called for the EU 'to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly

neighbourhood – “a ring of friends” – with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations’ (European Commission 2003: 4). As will become evident, the mechanisms through which the ENP has sought to do this share much with the previous enlargement policy, focused as it is on offering a closer relationship with the Union in return for adherence to EU norms. However, with membership off the agenda the carrot is smaller, with Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) providing the closest possible relationship the EU presently has on offer (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 7). Neighbours will remain neighbours.

As Schumacher (2015: 386) argues, the terminological references to ‘good neighbourliness’ (but also to the ‘neighbourhood’ and the ‘ring of friends’ as such) within the ENP reflect the EU’s perceived need for a new narrative for the post-enlargement environment. The ENP, however, did not just respond to a perceived narratological absence. The chapter argues that it has also functioned as a supreme geopolitical constitutive act, with the naming of the ‘neighbourhood’ in the ENP instantiating a particular geopolitical imaginary of the nature of Europe. In other words, the ENP is premised on a particular geopolitical vision of what we might term a ‘hub-and-spoke’ Europe. In this imaginary the EU is located at the centre, a presumed pole of attraction and source of order (and ordering). In contrast, the neighbourhood – destined to remain formally excluded – appears as a kind of buffer zone or marchland (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 527; Walters 2004) to the chaos lying beyond. As will become evident, however, in the EU’s ENP discourse the friendliness of the neighbourhood countries cannot be taken as given, but is primarily related to how far they find the EU attractive and wish to draw closer to it via active engagement with the ENP and their appropriation of EU norms through it.

Despite appearances, however, and despite its predominant position in respect of the neighbourhood, the chapter argues that the EU’s ability to impose on its neighbours the geopolitical imaginary of European space embedded within the ENP is restricted. Indeed, the fact that in 2015 the ENP was undergoing its second revision since its implementation in 2004 is indicative of this, with the background documents noting its various failures and limitations to date. The chapter therefore demonstrates that those in the neighbourhood have had considerable ability to ‘bite back’ (Parker 2000) and impact on the core. In doing so they have been able to exert influence on the EU, not least in terms of how it conceives of itself, its security environment and the very idea of Europe and Europeanness that underpins this.

The chapter begins by outlining the EU’s geopolitical vision of Europe and its construction of the neighbourhood in the ENP in more detail. It then examines the ENP in practice, before a final section explores the ‘partners’ role in impacting back on the ENP and the construction of Europe in the policy. The chapter concludes with a few reflections on the most recent EU documents in preparation for a new ENP and the extent to which they are opening up to a different vision of the EU’s relationship with its neighbourhood.

## **Of Mindscapes and Geopolitical Imaginaries**

As a policy targeted at partners beyond its borders the ENP is inevitably imbued with a particular idealisation of European space. To this extent it betrays a particular mindscape and geopolitical vision. The concept of mindscape refers to how actors generate particular geospatial visions that come to frame both their perception of and responses to their environment. Once constructed they provide 'a mental map, a way of looking at things and one's environment, whilst also becoming prescriptive of how to move through the mindscape' (Browning and Lehti 2007: 695; Liulevicius 2000: 151). To this extent mindscapes perform an ordering function, establishing grounds upon which actors are able to understand the nature of the situation they face, distinguish between the 'normal' and 'abnormal', and as such provide an impulse for action insofar as mindscapes entail a vision of what 'ought' to be (Eglitis 2004: 8-10).

The mindscape of the ENP comprises at least four elements. First, it is premised on a particular teleological vision that positions the EU at the forefront of a universal developmental model, and representative of what is quintessentially 'normal'. This model is premised around open economies, de-bordering and democratic governance. It is assumed that this model of liberal economic and political governance is universally attractive, that the tide of history is going this way, and that this is the form of order and society to be aspired for. Intimately connected is the second element, which is the assumption that while the model itself is attractive, so too is the EU. Therefore, it is expected that outsiders will aspire for a closer relationship with the Union – either through membership, or failing that, through some form of association. Derivative of this is the third element, which is that the world beyond the EU's borders is a world of risks, instability and insecurity. The mindscape is therefore one differentiating a safe inside from a potentially chaotic, threatening and 'abnormal' outside, an outside that either needs to be tamed (i.e. through the ENP) and/or kept at arms-length.

Lastly, however, despite the universalist claims surrounding the EU's developmental model, the ENP itself rests on a restricted and geocultural conception of Europeanness that is in essence highly particularist. This conception is evident in the subdivision of the neighbourhood into a 'European East' (where the 'Europeanness' of partners like Ukraine is taken for granted) and a 'non-European South' (where the 'Europeanness' of partners like Morocco is rejected<sup>1</sup>) within the policy and the development of different policy instruments within the ENP for dealing with them - the Eastern Partnership and the 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean'.

The above claims can obviously be contested at an empirical level. For instance, the idea that the EU has a singular developmental model to offer is open to question (Kurki 2013: chapter 8) and is something returned to later. The same applies to embedded conceptions of Europeanness, of who qualifies or does not qualify for inclusion in this privileged category. This is evident in internal EU disputes over Turkey's European credentials, debates that often hinge on disagreements as to whether the core characteristics of Europeanness should be culturally, racially, religiously or geographically determined.

Setting those issues aside for the moment, the key point to note is that in turn this mindscape has tended to foster an imperial vision in respect of how the EU views its relationship with its outside, and with its neighbourhood more specifically (Del Sarto 2016). In short, the mindscape places the EU at the apex of a hierarchy, dispensing wisdom. For instance, as stated in Article 8(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the sense of 'good neighbourliness' aspired for in the ENP is to be generated and 'founded on the values of the Union'. Elsewhere these values are stipulated in terms of 'a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law' (European Commission/High Representative 2013: 14) although, as we will see, in its actual implementation the EU places at least as much emphasis on fostering open liberal market economies. The point, as Schumacher (2015: 386) notes, though, is that Article 8 refers 'exclusively to the values of the EU (the self) and not the other', with this becoming 'an important tool in the EU's discursive efforts of self-presentation and of delineating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion'. EU norms, values and practices are essentially seen as non-negotiable, with the ENP as such imbued with an imperial impulse – to reproduce itself on the outside while keeping the borders between inside and outside in place.

The notion that the mindscape of the ENP entails an imperial impulse is important and can be contrasted with other geopolitical visions often ascribed to the EU, be it of the EU coalescing into a unified Westphalian state-like actor with a unified and impermeable border regime, a currency and army etc., or of the EU promoting the postmodern neomedievalisation of Europe into an area of multidimensional overlapping spaces and networks (Browning 2005). Elements of all three can arguably be detected in the ENP but an imperial vision of the Union extending its influence, norms and practices beyond its borders is arguably the overriding impulse (see Browning and Joenniemi 2008).

### **The ENP in 'Imperial' Practice**

While the mindscape sketched above emphasises the EU as a beacon and agent of (imperial) transformation, this imperative is further supported by two other important constitutive narratives related to the EU as a peace project and the integration-security dilemma raised by the decision to delimit final borders for the Union. Starting with the second, the challenge facing the EU has been how to avoid alienating its neighbours, how to promote reform within them, and how to avoid the EU's external border becoming a line of exclusion and negative othering now that enlargement is off the agenda. As Jeandesboz (2007) argues, in the debates framing the constitution of the ENP this has essentially translated into the neighbourhood being viewed as a source of threats to the EU and the need to avoid any negative spill-over into the Union. Such threats have generally been understood in terms of illegal immigration, terrorism, organised crime, communicable diseases and social ills associated with poverty. With the disciplining mechanism of enlargement off the agenda the outside has therefore become a space to be kept outside and guarded against, but also managed in such a way as to keep it friendly (Pardo 2004: 735). As such, instead of establishing a

Westphalian border of total exclusion, Del Sarto and Schumacher (2005: 19, 25-6) argue the emphasis has been on turning the neighbourhood into a buffer zone. The ENP therefore seeks to blur the border with the neighbours in some spheres of activity as a way of making them responsible for controlling their borders furthest from the Union, thereby pushing the threatening outside further away.

This security imperative driving engagement with the neighbours is, in turn, supported by a deeper ontological narrative of self-identity that depicts the EU as fundamentally a project for bringing peace and stability to the continent. This has created a sense of moral imperative and duty determining that the EU cannot be self-satisfied with its own internal achievements. Instead, it also needs to organize the space beyond its borders, spreading European values in a broader effort of creating a 'Europe whole and free' (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 524, 532; Schumacher 2015: 384-5).

In practical terms the ENP has been designed to respond to these imperatives by offering the 'opportunity of closer economic integration with the EU and the prospect of increased access to the EU's Internal Market' in return for 'the implementation of challenging political, economic and institutional reforms, and a commitment to common values' (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 2). The EU emphasizes it is not seeking to 'impose a model or a ready-made recipe for political reform' and has argued that the ENP can be differentiated to respond to the partners' different ambitions (European Commission/High Representative 2011: 2-3). EU discourse on the ENP is therefore replete with notions of voluntarism, while asserting that in principle everything is possible bar institutions (i.e. membership).

Even so, the ENP's normative aspirations are clear. Thus, in 2011 the ENP's commitment to transformative change in the neighbourhood was upgraded to an emphasis on promoting, not just democracy, but 'deep democracy' (European Commission/High Representative 2011). As Kurki notes, deep democracy seems to combine a concern with institutions and elections with a more wholesale 'reform of societies' economic, civic, cultural and political structures'. Indeed, she argues that the policy is becoming notably embedded with neoliberal preferences and tendencies insofar as the policy increasingly emphasizes economic rights and calls for economic liberalization (Kurki 2013: 153-4). The latter is evident, for example, in the more recent advent of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas and visa free regimes for the most willing partners (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 2).

However, while there is nothing forced about the ENP, the policy strapline that the ENP offers 'more for more' (a closer relationship in return for more change) is clearly designed as a form of strategic leverage premised on the EU's continuing reliance on principles of conditionality that have served it well in the enlargement process. As the European Commission puts it: 'Increased EU support to its neighbours is conditional. It will depend on progress in building and consolidating democracy and respect for the rule of law. The more and faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more support it will get from the EU'. The carrot of 'more' EU is therefore seen to offer leverage over the partners, while the

flip side of conditionality is not simply that those who fail to reform will get less, but that 'where reform has not taken place, the EU will reconsider or even reduce funding' (European Commission/High Representative 2011: 3). Such progress (or lack thereof) is measured against Action Plans (or Association Agendas for those partners who have signed AAs) that the partner countries are required to negotiate and agree with the Commission on an individual bilateral basis. By constituting the ENP around a set of carrots and sticks the EU is therefore establishing criteria and conditions that the partners need to meet to become fully embedded as part of the EU's 'ring of friends'.

Therefore, despite the voluntarism the EU's prescription of norms and emphasis on conditionality as an enforcement mechanism in the ENP does inscribe the policy with hierarchical and imperial tendencies. Thus, there is little doubt as to who is expected to learn from whom, or of the fact that the EU positions itself as more advanced and temporally ahead on a range of measures. This makes the frequent references to 'joint ownership' and 'partnership' in ENP documents disingenuous. Reflecting on the EU's relationship with Ukraine in the ENP, Kurki (2013: 165) therefore notes that there has been notably little discussion of what 'shared values' like democracy might mean, with the EU largely 'dictating to Ukraine' democracy support requirements in a manner 'which is clearly not in line with pluralism or debate'.

This approach has not been entirely successful. As the Commission itself has noted, the 'more for more' strategy 'has not always contributed to an atmosphere of equal partnership, and has not always been successful in providing incentives [for] further reforms in the partner countries' (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 4). Indeed, it is reasonable to wonder whether an equal partnership is even feasible in a situation where the values to be promoted have been predetermined by the more powerful party. The approach, however, also has other constitutive effects. For instance, it has the effect of promoting a hierarchy of otherness, with this operating in two respects. First, at the broadest level the ENP's very existence is indicative that the partners of the neighbourhood are viewed, not only as geographically closer to the EU than those that lie at a greater distance, but also potentially as normatively more similar (or able to be made so). However, whilst their status as (potential) 'friends' is what draws them closer, it also constitutes their otherness, not least by designating them as more foreign than the few remaining prospective candidate countries for membership, though arguably less foreign than those that are not part of the ENP.

Second, though, in providing for differentiation between partners the conditionality mechanism also has the potential of constituting ENP countries as being more or less friendly/threatening to the EU relative to each other depending on their willingness to buy into the ENP's normative transformative vision. In short, friendliness in the ENP is primarily related to how far the partners find the EU attractive and wish to draw closer to it via active engagement. The danger is that this reduces friend-threat calculations down to assessments of others' desire to become like us and the EU's ability to reproduce itself on its outside (Browning and Christou 2010: 112). This is also significant in that insofar as the ENP is embedded with a mindscape that assumes the universal attraction of both the

values the EU claims to stand for and of the EU itself, then any rejection of the ENP (or failure to actively embrace its transformative agenda) is liable to pose an ontological challenge to the EU by questioning the EU's own self-understanding as a model to be aspired for and emulated by all.

### **The Constitutive Power of Neighbours**

This last point is significant as it suggests that although the mindscape of the ENP is impregnated with a normatively imperializing geopolitical vision, with the EU seeking to expand its influence beyond its border by normalizing its conception of good governance for those beyond, this is actually a two-way relationship, with the EU also vulnerable to the partners' actions. This is to say that the partners also have constitutive power to impact on the nature of the ENP, and therefore on conceptions of the nature of the border, the EU's sense of self-understanding and its perception of the security environment it faces. As Parker (2000; 2008) puts it, marginal actors often have the capacity to 'bite back': often in unanticipated ways. For instance, the very fact that the ENP presumes that the EU is sufficiently attractive that the partners will sign up to its preconditions, even despite the carrot of membership having been withdrawn, assigns the partners a power of 'recognition/non-recognition'. While active engagement with the ENP signifies recognition and an endorsement of EU conceptions of self-identity as a benevolent peace project, non/restricted-recognition via limited engagement and enthusiasm for the ENP puts such claims in question.

It is therefore not surprising that in EU discourse the partners have increasingly become located along a spectrum from willing to unwilling others depending on their acceptance of the ENP's Europeanizing agenda. One consequence of this is that the partners' differential willingness to respond to the EU's overtures in the ENP has impacted on the openness and reciprocity the EU is willing to countenance with its neighbourhood partners. For example, despite rejections of its Europeanness the EU has been willing to reward Morocco with participation in various EU programmes, a mobility partnership and a DCFTA, a level of engagement that has so far eluded some of the other partners. As such, through its attempts at extending EU norms of governance the ENP has not resulted in uniform borders, but significant plurality. Moreover, the character of the neighbourhood as a buffer zone to that which lies beyond has also tended to take on a different complexion between the eastern and southern dimensions of the policy insofar as the 'European aspirations' of some of the Eastern partners (e.g. Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) remain acknowledged in their respective AAs, while such possibilities go unmentioned in agreements with the southern partners.

The EU has therefore begun to talk about the need for the ENP to embrace '*some kind of variable geometry with different kinds of relationships for those partners that choose different levels of engagement*' (original emphasis) (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 7), thereby explicitly acknowledging the ability of the partners to frame the EU's geometry at its borders. However, as the EU has also been forced to acknowledge, it is not only the partners that have this capacity, but those beyond as well. Thus, the EU has recognized that other actors



have also become increasingly involved in the region (not least Turkey and Russia), which 'may also make the EU less attractive as a model and partner'. This, it is now noted, 'will require the EU to reflect on how to have a more multilateral policy approach, involving and working with, more systematically than it does now, the other actors working in the neighbourhood in addressing, together with partner countries themselves, issues of shared interest' (European Commission/High Representative 2013: 22). The top-down imperial mindscape and geopolitical vision of the ENP therefore encounters significant obstacles on the ground. This can be further demonstrated with a more direct comparison of the ENP in both the southern and eastern parts of the neighbourhood.

As noted, the EU has never seriously considered the southern partners of the ENP as (potential) European countries. As such, their otherness and non-inclusion as members has been presumed from the start. At the same time, this constitutive move is reinforced by the fact that (aside from Morocco in the 1980s) the southern partners also have not expressed any aspiration for membership, let alone constituted their own self-identities in terms of Europeanness.

On its inception, however, it was also clear that in the post-9/11 context questions of security dominated EU concerns with respect to the south in the ENP. A key question was therefore how the EU would use the ENP to address the various security problems it saw as emanating from the region. In this respect, Malmvig (2006) notes that historically EU policy towards the Mediterranean has tended to be driven by a tension between contradictory security discourses. The *liberal security discourse* has emphasized the promotion of democracy and human rights, the belief being that the absence of democracy, the rule of law, basic freedoms and economic growth has created fertile ground for the emergence of threats of terrorism, radicalization, migration and organized crime. Thus, from this perspective the very existence of authoritarian regimes in the region, and their reliance on cronyism, corruption, repression and violence, is central to the problem that needs to be tackled. Diametrically opposed to this is what Malmvig terms a *cooperative security discourse* that sees these authoritarian regimes as partners in tackling common challenges of terrorism, radicalism, WMD, organized crime, illegal migration etc. The record, particularly since 9/11, Malmvig contends, suggests that the EU has generally prioritized stability and regime security over promoting democracy and human rights, the suggestion being that the prospects of the ENP promoting transformation in the southern neighbourhood have therefore been slim.

Importantly, the southern partners have themselves reinforced this view and the cautious approach the ENP initially adopted. Thus, although a closer relationship with the EU is perceived as offering a number of (mainly economic) benefits, the ENP's references to democratization and transformation are viewed suspiciously, and even as a source of threat to regime security. Hence, while the ENP speaks of the need for cooperation in matters of security, it is not always clear that the EU and its partner regimes in the south identify threats in the same way. These tensions over security perceptions have impacted on the potential impact of the ENP and have affected the nature and logic of the neighbourhood border zone created. In the south the border has therefore been primarily viewed by the EU as

a border between safety and threat and as a line of control and exclusion, the EU goal essentially being one driven by logics of 'containment' (Walters 2004: 692).

It is important to note that the first revision of the ENP took place in 2011 in the wake of the 'Arab spring' and was to a large degree inspired by it. Acknowledging the limited successes of the original ENP in 'incentivizing authoritarian regimes in the south to embark on wide-ranging political and economic reforms', (Schumacher 2015: 382) Schumacher argues that the new ENP sought to place greater emphasis on the liberal security discourse of democratization. Thus, Stefan Füle, the Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, stated shortly after the overthrow of President Ben Ali in Tunisia that, 'the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region ... [was]... short-termism' (quoted in Schumacher 2015: 387-8). There was clearly a sense, therefore, that the Arab spring might be capitalized upon. The subsequent retrenchment of the presumed 'democratic' uprisings, the reassertion of authoritarian rule in many of the southern partners, the intensification of the trans-Mediterranean migration crisis, the civil wars in Libya, Syria and the rise of ISIL, however, has considerably dampened the initial optimism of 2011. Thus, ENP progress reports with respect to the southern neighbourhood continue to be notable for their recognition of a lack of progress in implementing the ENP's agenda of normative transformation.

In comparison the EU's approach to the eastern neighbourhood looks subtly different. One major reason for this concerns the fact that the Europeanness of the eastern partners is not questioned and their membership aspirations acknowledged in various of the AAs. More than this, though, for the most part the eastern partners have also sought to strategically mobilize their Europeanness in ways arguably uncomfortable for the Union. Thus, while the EU has seen the ENP as offering an alternative to membership, several of the eastern partners have refused to let the issue lie. Continually asserting their European credentials – be it culturally or through gradual economic and democratic transformation as stipulated in the ENP Action Plans – has been a way to keep enlargement on the agenda.

There are parallels here to the 2004 EU enlargement process, where Schimmelfennig (2004) argues the prospective members were able to keep enlargement on the agenda by consistently referring to the EU's own constitutive discourse as a peace project open to all in Europe. Failure to enlarge, he suggests would have spurred an ontological crisis for the EU. In a similar vein, the leaders of Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' in 2004-2005 presented the revolution as indicative of their European credentials, with these claims endorsed by EU leaders. Likewise, Ukrainian leaders have insisted that their signing of an Association Agreement with the EU would be 'without prejudice' to their further European aspirations (Runner 2008). Thus, while the eastern partners are implicitly depicted as lagging behind, and therefore as somewhat 'inferior' and 'backward', they have managed to avoid being excluded as such with the potential still to become fully European via membership (Tiirmaa-Klaar 2006)

There is, however, another important element at play in the eastern neighbourhood, and which concerns important changes to the geopolitical landscape since the ENP first emerged as a consequence of Russia's increasing assertiveness. The result is that the ENP is no longer the only game in town, with a choice of models now available to states in the neighbourhood. To be sure, Russia's assertiveness also entails a carrot and stick approach. The stick has been seen in the context of its military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent and ongoing conflict in Ukraine – all events sparked by concerns in Moscow about what they see as key states in their own sphere of influence/near abroad (a more pejorative label for neighbourhood perhaps) orienting too closely to the West. The carrot, by contrast, is evident in the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as a competitor to the ENP's Eastern Partnership.

The result has been a certain amount of recognition that the eastern neighbourhood has become a zone of geopolitical competition between the EU and Russia for the attentions of the region's states. The fact, for example, that at the last minute Armenia did not sign the agreements it had negotiated with the EU for an AA/DCFTA, but instead decided to join Russia's EEU, demonstrates that the EU cannot presume its power of attraction will win out in this competition (European Commission/High Representative 2014: p.5). As the EU notes, for the partners 'there is a choice to be made' because joining the EEU precludes further integration with the EU through a DCFTA (European Commission/High Representative 2013: 22). However, while stated as such this can sound slightly threatening or admonishing to the partners as they make their decision, the flip side is that it also stands as an injunction for the EU to offer sufficiently attractive carrots if it does not wish the eastern neighbourhood to fall ever more under Russian influence. It is therefore notable, not only that the EU signed an AA with Ukraine on 27 June 2014, just over a month after Russia's annexation of Crimea, but that it also asserted that 'the Association Agreement does not constitute the final goal in the EU-Ukraine cooperation' (European Commission/High Representative 2014: 3). Membership, therefore, potentially remains on the agenda. What this suggests, however, is that the eastern partners possess considerable leverage as, in different ways, the EU and Russia compete for their attentions.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has argued that the ENP has served an important geopolitical constitutive function, re-imagining Europe in terms of an EU core, surrounded by a buffer zone of a so-called 'ring of friends', beyond which lies a more threatening world. The ENP has therefore aspired to be a policy of geopolitical ordering. It has also been argued that the mindscape underpinning the ENP has imbued it with an imperial geopolitical impulse as a result of the EU's assumption that its norms, values and practices – and therefore the EU itself – are inherently attractive and desired by others. The ENP therefore results in the border with the partners being blurred to some extent, but with this border now appearing akin to a colonial frontier in which the EU projects itself into the space beyond, pacifying and

assimilating it to a degree by defining the bounds of appropriate behavior and practice (Walters 2004: 687). However, insofar as the mindscape of the ENP differentiates the neighbourhood into an eastern 'European' zone and a southern 'non-European' zone it also provides the buffer zone of the neighbourhood with a differentiated character, and where in the south a threat-defence mindset appears more in evidence.

However, it has been shown that the neighbours also have considerable ability to 'bite back': by their power of (non-)recognition, their willingness or otherwise to endorse the EU's transformative normative agenda, and not least, their ability to play the EU off against contending visions offered by those beyond the neighbourhood. Insofar as they do this they are able to impact on the nature of Europe in construction, the nature of its borders of inclusion/exclusion, and the bases upon which conceptions of security/threat are defined. What is certainly clear is that the positions of the neighbours have resulted in a much more variegated ENP than was initially outlined by the EU, and one in which it has become relevant to speak of an emerging variable geometry along the EU's borders.

In conclusion, and writing in a context in which the ENP is undergoing its second round of revisions since its initial framing in 2003/2004, a few words about the possible future of the ENP are merited. Most notable, perhaps, is that there is much more soul searching evident in the most recent EU documents released in preparation for the new ENP than at other times. Previous documents, for example, have often noted the limited progress of partners in implementing the reform agendas agreed in their individual action plans, but with the response essentially being that the partners must therefore try harder to meet 'their commitment to achieving the objectives jointly agreed with the EU' (European Commission/High Representative 2013: 21).<sup>2</sup> Statements released in 2015, however, suggest a more reflective view is becoming dominant. For example, a joint consultation paper on behalf of the Commission and the High Representative recognizes that the ENP 'has not always been able to offer adequate responses... to the changing aspirations of our partners', that 'not all partners seem equally interested in a special partnership with the EU under the model of pluralism and integration', and that, '[t]he approach of "more for more"... has not always been successful in providing incentives' (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 2, 4). This shows clear recognition that the EU's power of attraction – particularly in view of the economic crisis affecting the Eurozone – may have diminished, but also that the conditionality mechanism is not working. Indeed, the document goes on to acknowledge '[t]he lack of a sense of shared ownership' (European Commission/High Representative 2015: 4) on the part of the partners, a point further reflected in Commissioner Johannes Hahn's desire 'to see a more equal partnership' (quoted in European Commission 2015). As the European Commission/High Representative (2015: 9) put it, there is a need to enhance the sense of shared ownership and to develop ways of working 'that are seen as more respectful by partners and demonstrate a partnership of equals'.

Such reflections are welcome. They indicate understanding that the EU no longer gets to unilaterally set the agenda of the future of Europe and there is a certain

amount of self-realisation that the EU can appear arrogant, imposing and imperialistic to outsiders. Whether their goals can be realized is, however, a more difficult proposition. This is because, despite the apparent mea culpa evident in such statements, it is also the case that the EU continues to remain deeply attached to its reformist agenda in its neighbourhood. How willing, therefore, is the EU likely to be in developing a genuinely equal dialogue with respect to the very framing of the values and norms that should underpin the ENP? This is not a technical question, but one that gets right to the heart of core elements of the EU's raison d'être and sense of self. Opening up such questions therefore highlights precisely the extent to which the (de)construction of the neighbourhood and the (de)construction of the EU itself are mutually implicated.

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<sup>1</sup> This reflects historical practice. For instance, in 1987 Morocco's application for membership was rejected simply on the grounds of it not being a European country (Neumann 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Insofar as the EU has engaged in introspection this has been confined to largely technical reflections as to whether the ENP instruments and mechanisms might be tweaked (European Commission/High Representative 2013: 21).

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